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Advent – The Plan

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Isaiah 53:10

Well, it has been my privilege over the last several weeks to bring us together in consideration of the incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ. I first said to you that you can't start with the baby in the manger and understand the story. You have to understand that that gift of the Lord Jesus is rooted in grief in the heart of God. It's also connected to grief in your heart.

God hears your cry, and the ultimate response is the sending of His Son. We also look to the fact that the announcement of the angels and that song, the most familiar hymn ever sung, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, with whom He is pleased,' is not just an announcement of a birth; it's a prediction of a death.

But I would like to just add one more piece this morning. I'd like to do this by means of a question. [This is a rhetorical question; don't feel the need to answer aloud.] If I were going to ask you to write down on a piece of paper the 10 top things that bring you pleasure, what would you write?

Be honest; don't feel the need to be super spiritual here at this moment; be honest. What would bring you pleasure; what does bring you pleasure? If you look back at the end of the day and say, "Wow that was a great day!" Why would you say that? If you look back on the week and say, "That was a wonderful week," why would you say that? What brings you pleasure?

I would like to confess to you this morning that all of the things that bring me pleasure are deeply spiritual, but I can't. I mean, I love Christmas. I love Christmas for the right reasons and the not so right reasons. I love Christmas cookies. Christmas cookies bring me pleasure of all shapes, flavors, and forms. I love a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. I love the smells of Christmas food cooking. I love having all of our children home; that becomes more and more precious with each year. Those are things that bring me pleasure.

Here's what I want you to understand...that this magnificent story that we have been considering really is connected to pleasure in the heart of God. And when you get that, it changes the way you think about this story. I'd like you to turn in your Bibles to page 614, in your church Bible. I just want to look at one verse out of Isaiah 53. This is a treatise on the suffering of the coming Messiah, and this is one of those, "says it all"

verses. It really is a capsule of this story, and it's a verse that you could probably just skip quickly through as you're taking in all of the amazing content of Isaiah 53.

Before I look at the verse, I want to give you a bit of the principle that will not seem like it connects to the pleasure of God, but it will, hopefully, as we look through the verse. There is no clearer, greater, more pointed demonstration of the love of God than the offer of His Son. There is no clearer, pointed, greater demonstration of the love of God than the offering of His Son. Let me read verse 10:

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him. He has put Him to grief when His soul makes an offering for sin. He shall see His offspring, He shall prolong His days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

This is one of these verses that is expansive; we could be here till Tuesday discussing it, don't worry, we won't be. I want to look at just this first phrase: "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him." And I want to start this way. I don't like this translation; I don't understand why the translators of the ESV chose the translation they chose because I think the translation actually is meant to communicate something clearer and stronger than this; it's in many other translations. It's this, "Yet it pleased the Lord to crush Him, He has put Him to grief."

Now, think about this for a moment; you have to get your mind around and your heart open to the radical thing that this phrase is communicating to you. How could it be that God the Father would ever find pleasure in the crushing and the grief of His Son? That's what this verse communicates, and it's meant to stop you up short; it's meant to make you ask the questions: "How? Why?"

If you are a parent in the room, think for a moment with me. Think of the heart that you have for your children. Oh parents, you know you fear for your children; you hurt for your children; you do everything you can to protect your children from danger. You repeat those warnings over and over and over again; your children roll their eyes because they've heard them again.

You do that because you love them, and you want to preserve them from any danger. You pray that their lives would be free of difficulty, that God would give them success. You would never want anything like what is being described in this passage to ever happen to one of your children.

I couldn't help, as I was reading this, to reflect on four years ago when our daughter, Nicole, was hit by a car. And the grief that we had in our hearts, the fear that we felt, and as much as we want to trust God, and we did, we would get up in the morning, and we'd sort of ride the emotional roller coaster of that day: What did the doctor say? What is the future going to be like for her? Is she going to be okay?

That's the heart of a parent. But you have to look at this passage and say, "What could be so powerful, so motivating in the heart of God, that He would be willing, even find pleasure in subjecting His Son to this horrible thing. What could be in the heart of God that would allow Him to do that? And the answer is this, hear what I am about to say: "Love, magnificent, faithful, joyous, redeeming love!"

But you say, "Paul, how do you know?" Well, because of the verse that I read as the call to worship. I will now quote it for you. I will probably quote a "tri" translation. I learned this verse in the King James, relearned it in the NIV, now I'm trying to remember it in the ESV; so you will get three translations at once. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

God so loved the world; God so loved the world; God so loved the world, that He would be willing to do this radical thing, give His Son. God looked at this broken world; He looked at us, broken inside, now separated in relationship to Him, the one thing we were created for, and God was so full of love, so full of grace, so full of compassion, He was not willing for the world and for us to stay in that state; that's love!

And because of the nature of sin, we were unable to help ourselves. We were unable to escape this dilemma that grips all of our hearts. We were unable to fix the world. God had to move on our behalf. God so loved the world, that He gave! No, God doesn't find pleasure in those particular moments of the suffering of His Son; He finds pleasure in what that suffering would result in.

This is, bottom line, a story of magnificent love, and I want to say it again...love we could never achieve or earn or deserve, it must be given as a gracious gift. God loved us this much, that He would be willing to subject His son to unthinkable things, why? Because that one death would give life to many; there's the plan.

Now maybe you're sitting there thinking this morning, "Okay, Paul, I understand this; I've heard this before; why are you making such an emphasis of this?" Well here's why. Maybe sometime next week or next month or sometime in the next year, you will, in some circumstance, some location, some relationship, be tempted to doubt the love of God.

Maybe it will be a moment of physical suffering, and you wonder why God has allowed this pain to be your experience. Maybe it will be in the midst of a very, very significant, relational disappointment; somebody that you love has turned their back on you, and you wonder why God has brought this into your life; maybe it will be in a moment of financial difficulty, and you have sought to obey God; you've sought to be a good steward of the resources He's given to you, but you've lost your job, and it doesn't make any sense.

Or maybe just look around at the world you live in, it looks like evil is prospering, and you wonder, "Where is God? Where is his love?" This is your argument. This is the place to

run because not only does the giving of Christ argue for the magnificence of God's love, but it argues that He will continue to love you.

Let me read for you from Romans 8; hear these words, "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" Now here's Paul's logic. If God would do this radical thing to offer His Son to cruel suffering and death, notice the two words in Isaiah 53:10, "It pleased the Lord to crush Him, to bring Him to grief."

Crushing has to do with the physical suffering of Christ. Every moment of Christ's life was physical suffering. He didn't just begin to suffer on the cross; His whole life was one of suffering. The manger began His suffering; He suffered every day as He subjected Himself to the harsh realities of life in a fallen world.

But there was emotional suffering as well. That's the grief word. He was despised and rejected, and that emotional suffering reached a crescendo on the cross when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"...in that terrible moment where the Father turns His back on His Son.

Now, Paul is arguing, if God would subject Christ, willingly give Christ in that way to us, will He not also give us everything else we need? It would make no sense for God to do this radical thing and turn His back on you in your moment of need. That would make no redemptive logic whatsoever. And so, Paul argues that your guarantee that God will be faithful to you, He will be with you and in you and for you and meet all of your needs as you walk through this life toward eternity; your guarantee is the cross of Jesus Christ.

If God did this for you, He will meet all of your needs. Now we need to talk about this for a moment. You and I have a terrible problem with the word 'need.' We load all kinds of things onto our needs list that are not needs. Paul is not arguing in Romans 8 that God is going to sign your wish list. But your Creator knows what you need, and He is totally committed to meet all of those needs.

You do not have to be afraid; you do not have to play out all the 'what ifs'. You do not have to figure out the sovereignty of God. There are moments in life when God will confuse you. You see those depicted in the Psalms; Psalm 13 says, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me, forever?" Sometimes it's confusing the things that God has brought into your life. You will never find heart rest, calm, and peace and security of heart, hear what I am about to say, by means of understanding because there are things that God will do in your life that you will not understand.

Tim Keller argues that the importance of believing in the sovereignty of God is not that that doctrine will make life make sense to you. The importance of believing in the sovereignty of God is precisely because life won't make sense to you.

And so, I have a place to run; I have an argument to give in those moments when it doesn't seem like God is hearing, when He seems distant, when I'm confused about what He's brought in my life, when I'm looking at the life of someone else, and that life seems easier, when an enemy is whispering in my ear, "Where is your God now?" I have an argument to give. I open my Bible to Isaiah 53:10 and Romans 8:31, and I say, "If God would do this for me, will He not meet all of my needs?"

Now, I want to ask you the pastoral questions this morning; that's my job to do this. Do you have rest in your heart? Do you? Do you live with peace, even in moments when you're not in peaceful circumstances? Do you have a stability and a security that's not related to the issue of the moment? Do you torment yourself with an endless list of questions that you are not able to answer? Do you wish that you had more control than you'll ever have?

Perhaps you have not understood the full implications of this season we're now celebrating. It is the ultimate demonstration of faithful love, and if God would give His Son in this way, will He not also deliver everything you and I need? This is the place where rest of heart can be found, and you know there are some of you, as I asked that question, your honest confession would have to be, "I don't have that rest." This is your place of rest.

Now, back to Isaiah 53... "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him, He has put Him to grief, when His soul makes an offering for sin." That's the plan. The plan was that a second Adam had to come; the first Adam failed the test, and a second Adam had to come. Jesus was that second Adam, and He had to be willing to live in the middle of the harsh realities and the temptations of life in a fallen world.

But He had to be willing to be obedient in every way, in every thought, in every desire, in every word, and every action. He must be obedient so as He goes to the cross, He is the perfect Lamb of God who can now carry our sins, satisfy the anger of God so that we would receive forgiveness, acceptance into the family of God, righteousness given to us through Christ, and eternal life. That's the plan.

We had a problem that we could not solve. It's called sin. You can't escape it in yourself. You can't defeat it. You can't redeem the world from its fallenness. We needed to be rescued. That's why the promise of a Savior is so precious. And so, from day one, that little baby was destined to die.

Listen! The cross isn't a moment of defeat; the cross is not an interruption; the cross of Jesus Christ was the plan. He came to be the Lamb; He came to be the offering that would finally satisfy God's anger. "For this result, He shall see His offspring, and He shall prolong His days." That in that one cruel death, life would be given to many, that there would be a great world-wide family of every language group, and every location of the globe, of every period of history, who would be given new life through the death of His Son, that He would have offspring like the sands of the sea.

What a plan! One death! Innumerable lives being given! “And He shall prolong His days,” to a Hebrew person, long life was a sure sign of blessing. And this little phrase, “He shall prolong His days,” is a hint that the death of Jesus wasn't the end of the story, that He would live on.

Surely a prediction of His resurrection, but a prediction of another thing, that Jesus would live on in the hearts of many, that He is new life, new life as a person. Paul says, “It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” He gives life to many.

And then, it finally says, “The will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand;” what a great phrase. When God placed this mission in the hands of Christ, He put it in good hands. Jesus would be faithful; He would do everything that the Father asked Him to do, and in so doing, would provide for us not only eternal life, but eternal hope. Jesus was faithful. He was willing; never for even a brief moment was His heart fickle; never for a brief moment did He reconsider. He accepted this severe job description with joy, and through Him, God's work prospers.

Now, I don't know, and it's probably good that I don't, all the things that you brought into the room this morning. I don't know the hardships that you're facing. I don't know the grief that is in your heart. I don't know the temptations that you struggle with, but I do know that you will be tempted to wonder where God is and what He's doing.

I do know that there's an enemy who would whisper in your ear, “Where is your God now? You've obeyed, for this? This is it? Where is that thing called grace? Where is His power?” Isaiah 53:10 can arm you in those moments. God's love is magnificent and faithful, so powerful, so willing, that He would be pleased to give His Son to cruel suffering and cruel death so that we would know life, and if He would do such a thing, is it conceivable that He would abandon you in your moment of need? No, He will not!

Rest won't be found in understanding. Rest is found in the pleasure of the Father and in the willingness of His Son, the Lord Jesus. There is no more clear-pointed, rest-giving demonstration of the love of God for you than the gift of His Son. I would plead with you in your moment of doubt or fear or hurt or discouragement, don't run from this One, run to Him, run towards that Love.

Let's Pray: Lord, in this world of darkness and sin, where things don't operate the way You intended as Creator, there are moments of confusion for us, moments where it doesn't feel like we're experiencing Your promises, moments where we wonder if You are present, moments where it seems like we're outside of the span of Your grace. Lord, in those moments of confusion, often the enemy comes to us to whisper words of deeper doubt into our ears. We pray that, in those moments, we would be strong in our belief, in the power and faithfulness of Your love, that if You gave Your Son to be crushed, to face grief for us, for our redemption, it makes no sense that You would abandon us along the way. May we run to You and not from You. We pray, in Jesus name, Amen.

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